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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: PRESIDENT-ELECT BARACK OBAMA

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Pro-government and independent press here featured front-page photos of the president-elect and reported the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (MFA) statement congratulating the United States on Senator Obama's election, with Foreign Minister (FM) Deng Alor hoping for "positive contributions" from the new administration. Editorial writers and columnists in a range of papers took turns in commending American democracy for Obama's selection, but also criticizing the past policies of the Democratic party toward Sudan. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Sudanese FM and Southerner Deng Alor expressed unbridled optimism at the prospect of an Obama administration through a press release on November 5, in which he noted the Government of Sudan (GoS) intends to open a "new chapter" with the United States. Alor claimed to have spoken with U.S. officials close to Obama who had promised they would make progress on normalizing U.S.-Sudanese relations, and even concluded that Obama has Sudanese blood, as his ancestors are descendants of the Luo tribes, Nilotic cattle herders such as Alor's own Dinka, which migrated from southern Sudan to Kenya centuries ago. The official spokesman of the MFA, northerner Ali al-Sadiq, was comparatively less enthusiastic, but still strove to contrast an Obama administration to GoS perceptions of the Bush administration. "We would hope that the slogan of President Obama - 'change' - would be reflected in the foreign policy in the United States, especially towards Sudan and oppressed countries, the Palestinians, the Iraqis and the Somalis. We would like to see some real change between Sudan and the United States."

¶3. (SBU) Editorial columnists differed in their analysis of the elections. El Hindi Izzedin, writing in the pro-government Akher Lahza, commended the U.S. for its elections, and encouraged other countries of the world to follow suit. Osman Mirghani, writing in the independent, non-Islamist paper Al-Sudani, interpreted the results by praising what he saw as American meritocracy, and criticizing Sudan's obsession with racial and tribal differences. Mirghani asks rhetorically: "Which would have been better - to bomb several buildings with planes on September 11, or to invest in its flexible political system, as Obama did? Which would have been better - to kill over three thousand Americans in the World Trade Center or convert three thousand Americans to Islam?"

¶4. (SBU) In his commentary article "I Have a Dream," in the independent daily Al Ayam, Al-Sadig Mahdi al-Sherief cautions Sudanese against hoping that an Obama presidency will improve relations with Sudan: "Do not dream of a happy world! As soon as a Caesar dies a new Caesar is born." Awkwardly paraphrasing Martin Luther King, Jr., he continues, "We, as generations who inherited this situation, have a dream too! Our dream is that Obama's America should balance and discern between its interests and our interests."

¶5. (SBU) Pro-government writer Mohamed Abdel Gadir, who recently accompanied GoS Vice President Ali Osman Taha on a trip to the UN, reiterated a common Sudanese fear that the incoming Democratic

administration intends to follow a much harsher policy towards Sudan than its predecessor. In pro-government Al-Rai Al-Aam, he writes, "Even though the Sudanese street is happy due to the new president's African roots, emotions should not distract us from the essential facts in review of the future of relations between Khartoum and Washington under the new Democratic administration." While calling the U.S. "the country of opportunities and miracles," he simultaneously warns that Senator Obama is prepared to embrace Susan Rice and John Prendergast, both former Clinton administration officials feared and despised by the Islamist regime, and so Sudanese should "not dream of a happy world... Khartoum and Obama's administration, what is coming is even worse!"

¶6. (SBU) The gold medal for hyperbole in the Sudanese press following the election of Senator Obama goes to Mekki al-Maghribi, in Al-Sudani, with an article entitled, "I Support McCain!" Al-Maghribi tells the Sudanese of his concerns about the Democratic Party by reminding them of the 1998 missile strike on al-Shifa pharmaceutical plant, and then veers far afield to imply that Obama intends the worst in Africa. "The modern Democratic Party has nominated a powerful knight called Barack Hussein Obama to implement the white man's interests easily! In fact, Democrats are wicked even more than the Republicans! Mr. Obama will infect the third world and the Islamic world ... to prove his impartiality!"

¶7. (SBU) Comment: Today's positive press reflects general Sudanese interest in the U.S. election and a local twist on the pan-African pride regarding Senator Obama. In fact, had two local independent newspapers not taken the drastic step to stop the presses for three days (with Ajras Al-Hurriya personnel observing a one-day hunger strike) to protest government censorship, Post expects that articles in a similar vein would have been even more plentiful. Editorials

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critical of the U.S. are nothing new in the Sudanese press, but today's criticism reveals a deep abiding fear within Khartoum's National Congress Party of President Bashir that a Democratic administration will pursue a tougher policy of confrontation and destabilization. This is in contrast with giddy congratulatory phone calls Charge Fernandez has received from several Darfuri rebels, opposition party leaders and an enthused Foreign Minister Alor. End Comment.

FERNANDEZ